

Effectively Communicating the Health Effects of Air Pollution

EJ Training Seminar

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Communicate

- To impart knowledge; make known; divulge
- To give or interchange thoughts, feelings, information so that it is satisfactorily received or understood
- To give to another; transmit
- Share

Communicating Health Risks

- Communication goes both ways
- “If we have not gotten our message across, then we ought to assume that the fault is not with our receivers.”
 - Famous Risk Communication Quote

Communicating Health Risks (continued)

- “...no simple formula for success in risk communication.”
 - Describing findings of NRC Report
- “Just the facts.”
 - Often a view of scientists, regulatory agencies, and industry
- Values are also important

Communicating Health Risks (continued)

When conflicts about health risks are present:

- Even the best risk communication may not improve the situation
- Poor communication, however, can make it worse.

Scientific and Regulatory Data

- Hazard evaluations
- Monitoring data
- Emissions data
- Exposure levels
- Risk Assessments
- Mortality and morbidity statistics
- Compliance with regulations

Factors Affecting Communication

- Trust
- Credibility
- Competence
- Control
- Voluntariness
- Fairness
- Compassion and caring

Fairness Issue

- Fairness affects the perception of risk
- Often disproportionate risk burdens on minority and low income areas
- Results in perception of greater risks than those that have less obvious inequities

Good Communication

- Builds trust
- Allows the public to influence decisions
- Takes seriously the issues of concern to affected communities

Risk Communication

- Public participation is an important part of the process
 - Expressing concerns to experts and regulators
 - Asking for or providing pressure to do analyses of risk aspects that otherwise might be overlooked

Perceptions of Risk

- Risks are estimated to be high when issues of control and equity are present
- Government or industry analysis: facility meets emissions limits – implies that operations are “safe”
- Community may perceive elevated risks associated with use and emissions of toxics near residences or schools

Factors Influencing Acceptance of Risk

- Voluntary vs. imposed
- Under individual control vs. control by others
- Clear benefits vs. little or no benefit
- Natural vs. man-made
- From trusted source vs. untrusted source
- Familiar vs. exotic
- Affecting adults vs. children

Communications Challenge

- Residents determine the issue is important
- Authorities cannot be trusted
- Community perceives itself as having little or no power

"Rules" of Risk Communication

- Accept and involve the public as a partner
 - Goal is to have an informed public
 - Involve at earliest stage possible
 - Clarify the public's role
 - Deal with everybody equally and fairly

"Rules" of Risk Communication (continued)

- Plan carefully and evaluate your efforts
 - Different goals, audiences, and media require different actions
 - Anticipate interests, concerns, questions
 - Develop key messages
 - Assemble supporting data, visual aids
 - Practice

"Rules" of Risk Communication (continued)

- Listen to the public's specific concerns
 - People often care more about trust, credibility, competence, and empathy than about statistics and details

"Rules" of Risk Communication (continued)

- Be honest, frank, and open
 - Factors in assessing trust and credibility
 - Empathy and caring
 - Competence and expertise
 - Honesty and openness
 - Dedication and commitment
 - Be mindful of enunciation, jargon, facial expressions, posture, gestures

"Rules" of Risk Communication (continued)

- Work with other credible sources
 - Conflicts or disagreements among organizations make communication with the public much more difficult

“Rules” of Risk Communication (continued)

- Meet the needs of the media
 - Media may be more interested in politics, simplicity, danger, rather than safety
 - Recognize importance of media in identifying disputes and in the flow of information
 - Provide technically balanced information

“Rules” of Risk Communication (continued)

- Speak clearly and with compassion
 - Acknowledge tragedy of an illness, injury, or death
 - People can understand risk information, but may not agree with you
 - Some will not be satisfied

“Deadly Sins” of Communication

- Appearing unprepared
- Handling questions improperly
- Apologizing for yourself or organization
- Not knowing knowable information
- Unprofessional use of audio-visual aides

“Deadly Sins” of Communication (continued)

- Seeming to be off schedule
- Not involving participants
- Not establishing rapport
- Appearing disorganized
- Providing wrong content

Summary

- Openness is important
- Trust counts
- Credibility is a must
- Two-way process